

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Joins call for Trump to utilize FEMA's disaster relief funds to aid response to coronavirus outbreak

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin joined 35 Democratic Senators in sending a letter to President Trump urging him to immediately consider any disaster declaration requests so states can utilize the \$42.6 billion currently available in the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) in their efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect public health. The Senators write that as the number of confirmed cases increases across the United States, the Trump administration must employ a whole-of-government approach, including the use of un-tapped DRF funding, and close collaboration with state, local, and tribal officials and providing necessary resources to those on the frontlines.

In the letter, the Senators note that were a disaster declaration granted, use of the DRF would allow FEMA to provide emergency protective measures to the state at a 75% federal to 25% state cost share for a wide range of eligible expenses and activities. While the immediate health risk to the majority of the American public is thought to remain low, the Senators emphasize that the challenges of community spread have already begun to strain state and local government responses, particularly health departments.

The Senators are calling on the Trump administration to utilize the \$40+ billion in the Disaster Relief Fund to assist state and local governments in providing critically-needed emergency protective measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of disease, save lives, and protect public health and safety.

The letter is also signed by Senators Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Patty Murray (D-WA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Ed Markey (D-MA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Bob Casey (D-PA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jack Reed (D-RI), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Angus King (I-ME), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Tom Carper (D-DE), Kirstin Gillibrand (D-NY), and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ).

The letter to President Trump can be found [here](#) and below. An online version of this release is available [here](#).

Dear President Trump:

We urge you to consult with Governors and immediately consider any Disaster Declaration requests pursuant to the Stafford Act for states preparing for and responding to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. As the number of confirmed cases increases across the United States, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should utilize the \$42.643 billion currently available in the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) to assist state and local governments in their efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect public health. This would not be an unprecedented action, President Clinton issued an Emergency Declaration under the Stafford Act in 2000 for New York and New Jersey and utilized this authority to pay for mosquito abatement. COVID-19 must be addressed swiftly and effectively, with all federal resources made available to impacted communities and tribes.

The DRF is the primary source of funding for the federal government's general disaster relief program. According to the March 6, 2020 Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report - Fiscal Year 2020 Report to Congress, the DRF has a balance of \$42.643 billion as of February 29, 2020. Under FEMA's administration, the DRF funds three relevant types of activities for the COVID-19 outbreak. The first are predeclaration surge activities, such as deploying response teams and prepositioning equipment. Second, the DRF funds Disaster Readiness and Support (DRS) activities which include all ongoing, non-incident specific FEMA actions. Finally, the DRF also funds Disaster Declaration activities. While a Disaster Declaration must be requested by a governor, if granted, it would allow FEMA to

provide emergency protective measures to the state at a 75% federal to 25% state cost share for eligible expenses and activities. According to FEMA's Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide v3.1, these eligible expenses include: medically necessary tests and diagnosis; treatment, stabilization, and monitoring; a one-time 30-day supply of prescriptions for acute conditions or to replace maintenance prescriptions; vaccinations for survivors and emergency workers to prevent outbreaks of infectious and communicable diseases; durable medical equipment; consumable medical supplies; temporary facilities, such as tents or portable buildings for treatment of survivors; leased or purchased equipment for use in temporary medical care facilities; security for temporary medical care facilities; use of ambulances for distributing immunizations and setting up mobile medical units; and dissemination of information to the public to provide warnings and guidance about health and safety hazards using various strategies, such as flyers, public service announcements, or newspaper campaigns. Under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (the Stafford Act), the President is authorized to grant a Disaster Declaration for any occasion when federal assistance is needed, and clearly the COVID-19 outbreak demands a swift and adequately resourced federal response.

As of March 10, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 647 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 25 deaths across 36 states. While the immediate health risk to the majority of the American public is thought to remain low, the challenges of community spread have already begun to strain state and local government responses, particularly health departments. State and local officials are working hard to mitigate the outbreak and protect Americans and ongoing federal resources are badly needed to support those efforts.

It is crucial that your administration employ a whole-of-government approach in responding to COVID-19. This includes working closely with state, local, and tribal officials and providing necessary resources to those on the frontlines. We strongly urge FEMA to stand ready to provide emergency protective measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of disease, save lives, and protect public health and safety, should any state request assistance.